

EXHIBIT 12



Hip-hop, Dylan Thomas and Wales



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By Kevin Powell

I have been in love with and a participant in hip-hop culture since I was 13. Coming of age in the New York City metro area, the birthplace of hip-hop, is the reason why, no question. Working-class Black and Latino youth created this music, this energy, and we really had no idea how much it would affect the entire planet.



Early on I tagged graffiti with magic markers wherever I could, and danced to hip-hop at every kind of party imaginable. Somewhere between my college years and the mass explosion of hip-hop in the early 1990s I started writing poetry and joined the hip-hop-inspired spoken word movement happening in New York. Then when music legend Quincy Jones launched Vibe magazine, to document hip-hop from all angles, I was very fortunate to get on board as one of the staff writers. I interviewed major rap stars of the era, including the late Tupac Shakur on several occasions. Years after I would produce the very first exhibit on hip-hop culture in America, via the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame.

Beyond all of this I have lectured about hip-hop culture, and the differences between the culture and what I call "the hip-hop industry," across the United States and globally. I have been blown away time again how hip-hop is the dominant youth culture on the planet. Even in Wales, the United Kingdom, where I recently spent significant time there is no greater evidence of this than a local organization based in Cardiff, the Welsh capital, called Grassroots Cardiff: <http://www.grassrootscardiff.com/>

I was invited to Grassroots to speak to its youth, who range in age from 16-25 and are all working-class, just as the famous Welsh coal miners of generations past. Where those miners formed all-male choirs to give voice to their passions today the Welsh young people of today have hip-hop. Grassroots Cardiff is a combination multimedia space, self-help center, and safe space for these young people. Three of them performed raps for their peers and myself and I felt as if I were back somewhere in the U.S.: they wore the "uniforms" of American hip-hop, the baseball caps, the tee shirts or hoodies, the work boots or sneakers (what they call "daps") in Wales; they had the mannerisms of hip-hop down as if they had created it in Wales, not Black and Latino youth in New York City; and they rapped about their Wales, about their hopes, fears, sorrows, and dreams.



This was hip-hop at its finally, fully loaded from Wales. I took to a microphone to speak with these youth and discussed my main reason for being in Wales: the nation's greatest writer ever, Dylan Thomas. Some youth knew of Dylan Thomas and some did not. It did not matter. I shared with them Thomas' short 39-year life and his great impact, from his roots in Wales, on African American writers like myself. The Grassroots young people were very surprised, and I can see a feel of pride swell in the room. For here they were, Welsh young people inspired by an African American art form called hip-hop, yet I, a Black man from America, was telling them that an artist from Wales had affected me greatly.



This is one of the great wonders of Wales, especially given that it has had multi-ethnic communities for centuries, including the first such neighborhood of its kind, Tiger Bay, right here in Cardiff. So there is an openness and a crossing of many cultural boundaries here in Wales passed from generation to generation, from African American artist and humanitarian Paul Robeson working with Welsh coal miners in the 1920s and 1930s, to African American me, writer, activist, hip-hop historian, bonding with these Welsh hip-hoppers in the 21st century.

Part of the bond, for sure, is the mutual love and appreciation of music that the Welsh and Black Americans share. Coal miners came together to form all-male singing choirs as a way to express themselves freely, in their own language, on their own terms. Similarly hip-hop is a mostly all-male created art form, created by working-class people just as those Welsh coal miners were, as a way to speak for themselves, to make something magical seemingly from nothing. I highly recommend to any African American who visits Wales to not only tour the coal mines, and to spend some time listening to one of the all-male choirs that still exist, but to also stop by places like Grassroots Cardiff.

I was able to visit each of these things and it all deepened not only my appreciation for the people and culture of Wales, but also for my own roots as an African American, and how much my culture means to the world.

Biography

Kevin Powell is one of America’s most celebrated writers and leaders. He is the author or editor of 11 books, a noted public speaker who lectures globally, a long-time community organizer and humanitarian, and the president and co-founder of BK Nation, a new American non-profit organization. He can be emailed at kevin@kevinpowell.net. Or follow him on Twitter [@kevin_powell](https://twitter.com/kevin_powell)



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